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ABSTRACT

As is enunciated by its policy guidelines, funds for compensatory education are being used to provide a diversity of intervention experiences for disadvantaged children. Difficulty in recognizing these implementation practices and outcomes has arisen because of a more popular, but narrow, view of compensatory education. Instead of attempting to discover whether intervention patterns have been established to administer to the needs of disadvantaged children, the emphases have been on identifying intrinsic conditions that would preclude the realization of the major goal of compensatory education. In 1972 a study was conducted with the purpose of determining whether the projects of a compensatory program were creating instructional and affective intervention units for meeting the categorical needs of its target population. It was found that the intervention projects had formed four individually prescribed learning (IPL) conditions. Each IPL condition was well-defined and served a unique subgroup within the target population. In the majority of the cases, the matches between the instructional content of the IPLs and the needs of the target schools were good. Where the matches were less appropriate, the rates of progress were lowest. In the main, the study supported the hypothesis that compensatory programs provide not a single thrust but a number of individually prescribed learning conditions to meet the behavioral needs of the children in the target population. These data suggest that additional monies are needed to assist local educational agencies in bringing into more proper alignment their current IPL conditions with the schools that they must serve. (Author/JM)

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As is enunciated by its policy guidelines, funds for compensatory education are being used to provide a diversity of intervention experiences for disadvantaged children. Difficulty in recognizing these implementation practices and outcomes has arisen because of a more popular, but narrow, view of compensatory education. Instead of attempting to discover whether intervention patterns have been established to administer to the needs of disadvantaged children, the emphases have been on identifying intrinsic conditions that would preclude the realization of the major goal of compensatory education.

A recent study has tended to show that compensatory education funds are producing specific intervention experiences (IE) for disadvantaged urban children. Findings of the study show that the IEs were most effective when they matched the needs of the children served and that more funds were needed to facilitate the rate at which such misalignments may be adjusted.

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COMPENSATORY EDUCATION: PROGRAMS OF DIVERSIFIED INTERVENTION EXPERIENCES FOR DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN

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Compensatory programs (like ESEA Title I) represent planned intervention experiences designed to reverse the declining achievement of those children having socially-induced handicaps (Wilkerson, 1970, p. 25). Because of the wide range of socially-induced problems such children bring to school, compensatory programs are seldom--if ever--singular or unitary thrusts. Each compensatory program does, however, have a singular purpose or goal and represents services for a specified target population. But, in its administration, each compensatory program provides a series of intervention projects, each of which is aimed at a specific problem or need within the target population.

The fact that more than one specific need exists within a given target population is well documented and, to a large extent, commonly acknowledged by educators, researchers, politicians, and the community. However, many of these same people see compensatory programs as uni-directed thrusts for improving the education of minority children in urban areas. This position would not be so alarming if it did not carry with it the implicit assumption or belief that compensatory programs must generate a singular, unequivocal solution

to the problems of urban education. Moreover, that mystical solution is thought to be so potent that it could suffice the problem wherever it presents itself.

The pervasiveness of this belief finds evidence in proclamations like: (1) compensatory programs will fail because they have attempted to service too large a population; (2) compensatory programs will fail because the "deficits" of the target groups are so severe that no reasonable amount of resources could reverse their educational plight; (3) compensatory programs will fail because the children in the target populations are not capable of higher levels of achievement; or (4) compensatory programs will fail because most evaluations have shown that after participation there is little or no difference between the target children and control (matched) groups.

These narrow views of the nature of compensatory programs are eclipsed when one considers the findings of those studies that attempt to view the total efforts of compensatory programs. Investigators like Deutsch, Katz, and Jensen (1968) have shown (1) that the range and variety of problems facing target children when they attend school are enormous and (2) that any measure which attempts to assist them must be comprehensive. Passow (1970) has found that compensatory programs usually offer two major types of instructional content: compensatory and developmental--compensatory content being methods or procedures for overcoming deficits in experience and knowledge; developmental content being methods or procedures which incorporated the basic skills areas (p. 156).

In discussing how one might determine the educability of populations with differential characteristics, Gordon (1970) suggested four requisite preconditions: (1) provision for a more appropriate distribution of emphasis between the affective, cognitive, and conative aspects of learning; (2) a shift in emphasis on educational appraisal from quantitative measures and static prediction to qualitative measures and dynamic prescription; (3) increased attention to individually prescribed learning experiences; and (4) greater concern for insuring that the learning experience is relevant to the general experience of the learner (p. 262).

Of Gordon's considerations, the need for individualized learning experiences (ILE) is most crucial for understanding the functions of compensatory programs. By ILE, Gordon means the matching of planned learning experiences with the characteristic needs of the target children. His concept goes beyond the traditional method of prescribing learning units which match the achievement level of the children per se. He is specifying the need for processes which would match the stylistic variations in learning behavior of the target population with instructional materials and techniques. It also means the translation of educational prescriptions into appropriate units of learning experiences (p. 263).

It should be apparent, then, that the crux of all compensatory programs is to produce individually prescribed learning conditions within the schools of the target population. Although much has been written about what children in compensatory programs are expected to

learn or accomplish, few studies have been undertaken in which one attempts to ascertain whether compensatory programs are producing adequate individually prescribed learning conditions. That is, whether the projects within the compensatory program are producing instructional and/or affective conditions that match the needs of the children in the target populations. This consideration is consistent with Gordon's conclusions about educability: "...Given the high incident of characteristics in [such populations]...the greatest promise of effort should be directed at the development of a match between the individual's behavioral style and background of experience on the one hand, and the nature and content of the learning experience on the other (p. 265)."

Studies of this kind have not been undertaken because there is still controversy over whether traditional design techniques (quasi-experimental procedures) can adequately measure the outputs of such programs. Most recently Zimiles (1970) and Campbell and Erlebacher (1970) have suggested that such techniques might have mistakenly made compensatory education look harmful. Campbell and Erlebacker suggested that one should move away from these design techniques to those which more adequately describe the intentions of such inputs and their corresponding outputs.

In 1972 a study was conducted with the purpose of determining whether the projects of a compensatory program were creating instructional and affective intervention units for meeting the categorical needs of its target population (Brown, 1972). It was found that the

intervention projects had formed four individually prescribed learning (IPL) conditions. Each IPL condition was well-defined and served a unique subgroup within the target population. Each IPL condition (1) had instructional content inputs that were significantly different, (2) had target children who had significantly different performance characteristics, and (3) had program cost inputs that were significantly different. Analyses of the gains made by each IPL group showed that the rates of gains differed from group to group, with the highest being 0.8 grade equivalents (GE) per year and the average being 0.6 GE.

The content of the IPLs were found to be operational functions of the individual and collective variables used by Bloom (1971) to explain up to 85% of the variation in school achievement. They were also found to be similar to the categories used by Bissell (1972) to define her five-fold topology for classifying the inputs of compensatory programs (in particular Title I funds) as school finance units.

In the majority of the cases, it was found that the matches between the instructional content of the IPLs and the needs of the target schools were good. And, where the matches were less appropriate, the rates of progress were at their lowest level. In the main, the study supported the hypothesis that compensatory programs provide not a single thrust, but a number of individually prescribed learning conditions to meet the behavioral needs of the children in the target population. It also seemed to confirm the proposition that when such matches are good, compensatory programs have their greatest impact.

Conversely, when such matches are deviant, achievement faulters.

These data suggest that additional monies are needed to assist local educational agencies in bringing into more proper alignment their current IPL conditions with the schools that they must serve. Such misalignments seem to occur for two reasons. The first reason is probably more prevalent within newly implemented programs: the misplacement of the specific projects developed through the compensatory funds. The second reason is probably more prevalent in long-standing programs: the changes or shifts in population and intra-district mobility. In the latter case, schools having appropriate matches become less effective as the original sample of target children become interspersed throughout the school system and new target children take their places. And, since the level of funds allocated to the local educational agency remains somewhat constant, it becomes difficult to set aside that amount of money which is required to properly administer to the needs of these transient groups. In other words, due to the sparsity of resources that are available for such services, the incidences of change-over in individual target schools occur more frequently than do their up-dates of instructional content.

As would be expected, variations in target school populations are most acute in those schools where changes in the community patterns have created a high-need condition from one which was previously a low-need condition. Since the former target group would require resources that are uniquely different from those

required by the latter group, obvious discrepancies would exist between the focus of prescribed instruction for the current group and the availability of appropriate materials and resources. This kind of a misalignment has a definite effect on the target children, their parents, the instructional personnel at the school, and program evaluation. The target children receive less than an adequate education. Parents of the target children feel that compensatory funds are being misused. Instructional personnel at the schools feel less accountable. Data from evaluation reports would show that progress of the target group was either not significant or exceeded by a control (matched) group's.

Another effect of misalignments has to do with the fade-out of gains phenomena described by Campbell and Frey (1970). Their study showed that skills and knowledge acquired during Head Start experiences were lost when, in subsequent years, their instructional content was shifted. They proved that these losses were closely related to the factors enunciated by learning theorists in learning, retention, and forgetting curves. The data demonstrated that there is a definite relationship between the discontinuity and/or discontinuance of compensatory programs and the rate at which target children extinguish their newly acquired knowledges and experiences. With their sample of Head Start children, they found that after the children had completed the program, their rates of extinction increased significantly from year to year. The results were that after being out of the special compensatory programs for two years, they had lost

the knowledge and benefits that had been acquired previously. These losses were attributed to the dramatic changes in the instructional content of the two educational exposures.

These findings imply that a reevaluation of the impact of compensatory programs is in order. The reevaluation should emphasize methods which identify, document, and appraise the effectiveness of the IPLs formed through the investment of compensatory funds. Assessments of this type are essential before decisions about the reduction or discontinuance of such programs can be made. Indiscriminate reductions in the number of children served or the discontinuance of such services are detrimental to the purposes of compensatory education. Such reductions would have the net effect (1) of destroying those individually prescribed learning conditions that had been established within a local educational agency, (2) of increasing the probability that the benefits received by the excluded children will be lost, and (3) of delaying the impact of compensatory programs by necessitating the creation and implementation of new sets of individually prescribed learning conditions for the new population.

To improve the educability of disadvantaged children, proper realignments of intervention experience with identified needs must be made possible through increased compensatory funding. It is imperative that both local educational agencies, who must repeatedly face changes in the composition of their target schools, live up to their obligation to strive for such individualized programs and that state and federal agencies be cognizant of their essential roles in these realignment procedures.

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